

VZCZCXYZ0005
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0127/01 0191440
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 191440Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6168
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000127

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/20/2020
TAGS: PTER PGOV PREL KDEM IZ
SUBJECT: LOCAL COUNCILS IN NAJAF PROVINCE -- GOVERNANCE, S
STEPCHILDREN

¶1. (U) This is a Najaf Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) reporting cable.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY. PRT representatives, including PRT Team Leader and Urban Planning Advisor, trained Najaf local council representatives in municipal budgeting in the United States and its transparency at a conference in mid-December. These local officials expressed frustration over the lack of responsiveness of the Najaf Reconstruction Committee (NRC) to their local needs, such as water, electricity, and schools, and sought PRT support to help advocate for more resources to address their critical problems. END SUMMARY.

U.S. MUNICIPAL BUDGETING: "NOW THAT'S TRANSPARENCY"

¶3. (U) In mid-December, PRT Najaf Urban Planning Advisor invited Najaf local council representatives to a presentation at the PRT to explain how typical small-sized cities in the United States carry out their budget process and generate revenue. Representatives present included local council members from Najaf, Kufa, Hurra, Manathera, and Haydaria. (NOTE. These local council members are appointed officials, who will serve until such time as local government elections are held. END NOTE.) PRTOff provided an example of a city of 4,000 with a budget of USD four million, explaining the expense side of the budget and noting that the entire budget was open to public debate with the final budget posted on the internet. Local council members were impressed that even salaries and benefits of city officials were posted on-line, stating "now that's transparency".

LACK OF COORDINATION WITH THE PROVINCE

¶4. (C) During subsequent discussions, the leaders expressed dismay with the province's top-down process, which failed to grasp the needs of the province's residents. The leaders complained there was inadequate dialogue and discussion in developing Najaf's master plan, which had been adopted by the Provincial Council (PC) in the fall. They claimed there had been no platform for negotiation, and believed the entire plan had been handed to them to sign, with scant opportunity for review or revision. PRTOff, who had worked closely with the provincial authorities and the PC on the technical work of the master plan, did note in response that he was aware of at least some opportunity for local public commentary. (NOTE: PRT local governance training has included sessions on soliciting public input, and the PRT continues to raise this as an important element of the planning process with the provincial authorities. END NOTE.)

KEY OBSERVATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

¶5. (C) the participants provided PRTOffs with several useful observations. The local council representatives complained that the Najaf Reconstruction Committee (NRC), which is under the supervision of the Governor, had done little outreach to

the local councils to assist in prioritizing district needs. The council members were stunned to learn the USG had completed over USD 240 million in capital projects in the province of Najaf over the past six years, and that an additional USD 20 million was planned for FY2010.

¶6. (C) The council members raised additional concerns about process and legislative concerns as well. They noted that Article 21 of the Provincial Powers Law stipulated local council elections within six months of the provincial elections that took place in January 2009, but that none of the representatives were even aware of any plans for such elections. (Reftel) They also pointed out that their salaries were paid, but they had no funding for any activities beyond a small stipend for office supplies, about the equivalent of USD 700. A Sadrists Trend local council member, Hussein Abdul Ameer Jabour, noted that districts were totally hamstrung in their efforts to attract international investment in their districts and that the current process was completely unsatisfactory. (COMMENT: The Sadrists Trend officially disavows contact with USG representatives, but Jabour appeared unconstrained and willing to discuss local government matters. END COMMENT.)

NEEDS OF DISTRICTS, SUB-DISTRICTS REMAIN ACUTE

¶7. (C) District representatives appealed to PRTOffs to lobby for and represent local governance concerns in future discussions with the Najaf Reconstruction Council on allocating projects. A member from Hydaria, for example, cited the need to address acute problems, such as water shortages and salinity. All agreed there was still no plan to

bring electricity to remote rural areas. The Sadrists member stated that schools remained a huge issue, and asked the PRT to provide trailers as a possible inexpensive solution to the ongoing school shortage.

¶8. (C) The representatives also pressed the PRT for more projects. PRTOffs noted that U.S. funding was in decline, while the GOI had USD 60 billion in its treasury, and that the United States was now focused on capacity-building and providing advice and expertise, rather than bricks and mortar projects. PRT Team Leader told the group it was up to Iraqis to work within the constitution to sort out the relationships, roles and budget-sharing between different levels of government. He suggested the PRT could sometimes play an advisory role in drawing attention to urgent matters, but it was ultimately up to the Iraqis to work out the political and budgetary compromises.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) The local council representatives clearly feel like governance's forgotten or overlooked stepchildren -- and they are clearly searching to establish their roles in the Iraq body politic and seeking help from any available quarter. They are particularly sensitive about being patronized by the PC, getting the brush off when they are not needed but suddenly finding themselves courted and flattered when the Council finds itself in need of their support.

¶9. (C) Most surprising to the PRT was the presence of a Sadrists at the training. PRTOFFs surmised that because he was not elected and is a lower-level appointed local representative, he felt comfortable attending. Given the frictions with Sadrists in the province, even the attendance of a relatively low-level figure should be viewed as an in-road.

HILL